

Digital literacy and technopolitics, core enablers in a disintermediated digital political communication age

Ana Pérez-Escoda; Maria-Raquel Freire

Nota: Este artículo se puede leer en español en:
<https://revista.profesionaldelainformacion.com/index.php/EPI/article/view/87438>

Recommended citation:

Pérez-Escoda, Ana; Freire, Maria-Raquel (2023). "Digital literacy and technopolitics, core enablers in a disintermediated digital political communication age". *Profesional de la información*, v. 32, n. 4, e320412.
<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2023.jul.12>

Article received on July 17th 2023



Ana Pérez-Escoda ✉
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4895-0043>
Universidad Antonio de Nebrija
Facultad de Comunicación y Artes
Departamento de Comunicación
Santa Cruz de Marcenado, 27
28015 Madrid, Spain
aperezes@nebrija.es



Maria-Raquel Freire
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2952-6017>
Universidade de Coimbra
Faculdade de Economia
Centro de Estudos Sociais
Av. Dr. Dias da Silva, 165
3004-512 Coimbra, Portugal
rfeire@fe.uc.pt

Abstract

The growing interconnection of technology and politics and the enactment of particular political goals (technopolitics) has been closely articulated with emotions and the building of foreign policy narratives. In the current context of change in the communication paradigm, global and disintermediated, bringing together in the same digital space distinct actors, and having wide diffusion and reach, the challenges to international politics are diverse. Digital and media literacy are, in this regard, key to address the implications of these changes, avoiding the spreading of disinformation, fake news and distorted practices that might have profound effects at societal and political level. In this context, this paper aims at providing a basis for understanding the emerging and increasingly clear connection between political communication, polarization, disinformation, and emotions in social networks and digital literacy as a central factor explaining misuse or alleviating deficiencies, on the one hand, and how this context is affecting the reconfiguration of international relations and politics, on the other hand. The case of the war in Ukraine is illustrative of these trends and dynamics.

Keywords

Digital literacy; Political communication; Politics; Technopolitics; Disintermediation; Fake news; Democracy; International relations; Social media; Journalism; Ukraine's war.

Funding

This work has been developed within the DIG-Compol network: "Innovation in digital political communication." Project financed by the "State Program to Promote Scientific, Technical and Innovation Research" of the *Ministry of Science and Innovation, State Research Agency (AEI)*, Spain (RED2022-134652-T).

1. Introduction

(Dis)information and media discourses are reshaping politics and international relations in a more global and faster way than they used to. On par with the expansion of the digital realm in today's societies, recent events, such as the Covid crisis or the war in Ukraine, have profoundly affected relations and perceptions of security and politics across Europe. As many authors state "Information has been weaponized" (Gerrits, 2018), a process further increased by social media and digital communication. Within this context, the "entanglement of technology with politics" (Edwards; Hecht, 2010) and the centrality of emotions (Hutchison; Bleiker, 2014) have been particularly important. In these dynamics, the media, considered legitimate social actors to communicate current events to the public, have been adjusting to two key factors:



firstly, the change in the communication paradigm that has led to a shift in the communication flow between the distinct actors involved: media, governments, politicians, institutions and citizens; and, secondly, the rise of social networks where media discourses are exposed to fast diffusion and global reach (**Couldry; Livingstone; Markham, 2007**), and to the direct interventions of users who participate on an equal footing as prosumers (**Ritzer; Dean; Jurgenson, 2012**).

“Easiness and flexibility in the distribution of information, combined with the capacity of any subject to generate information and interaction, led to a new era”

The discourse of public opinion and emotional appeal through social networking points to how the

“collective dimension of emotions shapes social and political processes” (**Hutchison; Bleiker, 2014**),

and to the many new issues that have been nurtured, such as highlighted by **Munger (2020)**: clickbaiting, filter bubbles, echo chambers, personalization of information, virality, reactivated more than ever by the role of disinformation and propaganda. Digital literacy (or the lack of it) is increasingly appreciated by academics as a significant factor to explain or avoid these issues (**Guess; Munger, 2022**) and, as an increasingly necessary process to avoid bad practices in information management and regarding fake news. According to authors such as **Mason, Krutka and Stoddard (2018)**, this literacy effectivity begins within an in-depth understanding of the media fabric.

This communication framework has been characterized and framed by a scenario of disintermediation (**Katz, 1998; Parisi; Rega, 2011; López-Jiménez, 2014**) that has changed the nature of communicating itself, of how issues are built and potentially manipulated and reinterpreted, with huge impact on international relations (**Barnett et al., 2017**). This has created a new state of affairs in which media and political discourses have been merged progressively in a digital and online scenario in which new agents have taken advantage of the different rules addressing the communicative ecosystem and altering international relations and the democratic sphere.

The analytical framework offered in this paper provides a descriptive analysis that leads to understanding the emerging relationship between digital literacy, political communication, and international relations. Starting with an overview of the communication paradigm shift, the article underlines how this change has influenced the relationship between political communication and journalism, the results of which, social media-enabled, are disintermediated scenarios of interaction that affect international relations. This context helps to deepen an analysis in which technopolitics and emotions are shown as drivers in the reconfiguration of politics and international relations, placing special emphasis on the case of the Ukrainian war as an example of disintermediation and technopolitics with President Zelenski's strategy in networks. The analysis finishes with an epigraph that shows the agreement between academia, the international sphere, and different European countries to promote digital literacy in the context of politics and international relations as a key factor in guaranteeing democratic processes, through a public opinion that knows how to read the context critically, and is aware of the digital, hyper-connected and disintermediated environment in which current political communication takes place.

2. When it all began: Change in the communicative paradigm

From media communication studies it results essential to analyze not only how the effect of communication on citizenship has evolved, leaving theories such as **Lasswell's (1927)** hypodermic needle obsolete, but also the control of information traditionally supported by the agenda-setting theory (**McCombs, 1992**), or even by the emergence of new epistemologies explaining the phenomena, such as theories on collective intelligence by **Lévy (2004)**, resulting from digital evolution towards a new cyberculture paradigm.

Trying to settle a very starting momentum of what has resulted in a new era, the term “net society” is already found at the beginning of the century (**Castells, 2001**) becoming the reference of a new paradigm, later defined by other authors as media convergence culture (**Jenkins, 2006**) or as a reinterpretation of McLuhan's media ecology (**Scolari, 2015**). This turning point meant an extraordinary social change in the emergence of a new media: the Internet, that will remain as the medium of the media. New technologies related to the Internet allowed the first substantial shift in the communication paradigm: easiness and flexibility in the distribution of information, combined with the capacity of any subject to generate information and interaction, led to a new era: the era of the prosumer—firstly foreseen by Alvin Toffler (**Ritzer; Dean; Jurgenson, 2012**).

In parallel, we find another phenomenon that explains the beginning of this change: Web 2.0 (**O'Reilly, 2004**), which constitutes the foundational architecture of the web as we know it today, characterized by algorithms and big data and on which the participatory and interactive philosophy of the Internet is based. Regardless of the numerous definitions found in the existing literature on the subject, what is most relevant is the coincidence in that the design of this architecture is user-centered, thus reinforcing the shift in the communication paradigm that gives a voice, capacity, and shared distribution tools to a global protagonist: the citizenry as a whole.

It is observed from this point that the traditional roles of media as legitimized information deliverers and audiences' influencers through their agendas have been definitively changed. Audiences disappear, transformed into users, and the media fade away as intermediaries of the information that remains as raw material for what **Ebersbach, Glaser and Heigl (2008)** called collective intelligence and **Jenkins (2006)** coined as participatory culture.

This gradual evolution, overcoming mediatization processes (**Schütz**, 2004) culminates, in the context of media studies, with the phenomenon known as disintermediation, affecting all sectors: social, communicative, political, democratic, educational, etc. Disintermediation, firstly coined by **Katz** (1998) is described in communication studies as the process

“in which society stops channeling information through traditional media and begins doing it through the Internet” (**López-Jiménez**, 2014, p. 15).

Disintermediation finds its maximum level of application in social networks, the quintessential scenarios of participatory and networked culture, platforms where information circulates and users interconnect, the maximum embodiment of virtual communities and an already defining feature of our society, considered as “the fifth power” (**Pérez-Escoda; Rubio-Romero**, 2021). The global intensive use of these scenarios by individual users –turned into prosumers–, the media, institutions, politicians and governments and, in general, all kinds of social stakeholders, has definitely consolidated disintermediation, opening up the possibilities of free circulation and distribution of information towards all types of positive and negative practices (**Parisi; Rega**, 2011). Digital scenarios globally and virally increase Walter Lippmann’s skepticism towards the media: bias, inaccuracies, or the lack of implicit truth, now developed into disinformation, infoxication, fake news, echo chambers or bubble filters (**Mcchesney**, 2013).

3. Political communication, journalism and social media as disintermediation scenarios

Disintermediation as a process of change has also affected political communication and international relations that encounter in social media valid scenarios for dialogue among primary stakeholders: politicians, heads of state, presidents and high executives talking directly to their audiences, generating interactions traditionally mediated by the media. This process directly transforms not only the long-standing traditional relationship between journalism and political communication, with technopolitics (**Kurban; Peña-López; Haberer**, 2017) and digital political communication (**Sampedro**, 2021), but also puts an end to the established mutual negotiation model between both elites, politicians and journalists (**Casero-Ripollés**, 2008). The American elections process with Obama, Trump and Biden constitute fair examples (**Carpenner**, 2010). Moreover, they have strongly contributed to biases, manipulation, and also misinformation to a level not seen before, transcending the local and becoming global. According to Gerrits:

“In international relations, disinformation and manipulation of information are instruments of foreign policy” (**Gerrits**, 2018, p. 5),

which not being new as a threat, acquires a concerning turn of greater magnitude due to the speed, reach and impact that social media allow as disintermediated scenarios in which the gate-keeper role provided by journalism has vanished.

In the last decade, both the casuistry and the literature on the role of social networks in political communication, the public sphere, the generation of opinion, polarization, bubble filters or echo chambers have been tremendously prolific due to the dimension of the phenomenon (**Casero-Ripollés**, 2022; **Couldry; Livingstone; Markham**, 2007; **Barnett et al.**, 2017; **Borge; Brugué; Duenas-Cid**, 2022; **Jungherr; Rivero; Gayo-Avello**, 2022). Authors such as **Chadwick** (2017) have described in a novel and thorough way how political communication has been increasingly transformed by the dynamics of digital media framed by continuous flows of information that break away from professional media routines. Perhaps the most novel contribution of the author, in line with the shift in the communication paradigm, is the new characterization of power, no longer centered on the media or political organizations, but on the user’s interactions, interconnections and relational capacities provided by the network.

In this sense, the trinomial analyzed –politics-journalism-social media– has led to different interrelated phenomena that assist in describing the current communicative framework.

- Firstly, we can talk about a new style of citizen participation. **Vaccari and Valeriani** (2021) conducted an analysis of the role of social networks in the dissemination of political content and the promotion of political participation of citizens in nine countries. The study shows that social media offer a solution to what the authors call “diseases of democracy”: the disconnection from politics and inequalities between those who speak out and those who remain silent. The authors challenge with evidence the most common and accepted beliefs about the role of networks in building echo chambers, bubble filters or fostering polarization, taking their analysis to the perspective of possibilities rather than disadvantages. Also, **Theocharis et al.** (2022) take up the importance of political participation fostered in networks, assuming that even though these are spaces where propaganda and disinformation are disseminated, they are also powerful scenarios for mobilizing and motivating citizens regarding their political commitment.
- Secondly, information manipulation, which is an “old story” as highlighted by **Manson, Krutka and Stoddard** (2018, p. 3), together with technologies unpredictably develops “fake news.” The emergence of the Internet

“The intensive use of networks has consolidated disintermediation as a fundamental feature of the new communicative paradigm”

Disintermediation affects political communication and IR and thus disinformation at an unknown level that is transcending the local to become global

and social networks has radically changed media coverage, and fake news development understanding necessarily requires an explanation of the social communication dynamics imposed by these environments and the disintermediation entailed by them (**Jungherr; Rivero; Gayo-Avello**, 2020). The influence of media discourses in democracies, in political communication and in international relations becomes decentralized, breaking the top-down informational model that occurred with mediatization.

- Thirdly, it is important to note that the irruption of the user through the networks in the political-journalism relationship introduces a fundamental aspect in this analysis: emotionality as a distinctive feature that is related in public debate to phenomena such as polarization and filter bubbles (**Hutchison; Bleiker**, 2014). Emotionality, in public debate and related to political communication, implies that people are, firstly, more willing to seek and consume information that corroborates their own beliefs, and, secondly, more likely to dismiss information that does not coincide with their preconceived opinions.

4. Technopolitics and emotions as drivers for the reshaping of politics and international relations

The amplified effect of new media and communication strategies in international relations is widely acknowledged, with narrative-building at center-stage (**Miskimmon; O'Loughlin; Roselle**, 2014; **Barnett et al.**, 2017; **Bonansinga**, 2022). In the making of foreign policy, material conditions such as military capacities, economic performance or geopolitical considerations are fundamental, but insufficient to grasp the complexity of the decision process. Non-material elements, such as identity building, status-seeking and the shaping of narratives are also key (**Freire**, 2019). In fact, narratives embody representations that are both a reflex of understandings and of practices of interaction, building often

“on a particular construction of self-identity in relation to the conceived identity of others” (**Jepperson; Wendt; Katzenstein**, 1996).

In this process, the context where interactions take place is socially constructed (**Wendt**, 1992), meaning it informs narratives' building, both reinforcing political positions and revealing their vulnerability. As such, narratives are

“sense-making and sense-giving devices that structure information, establishing cognitive and normative maps to understand the political world” (**Bonansinga**, 2022, p. 4).

The way in which the construction of narratives takes place and is communicated is, thus, important, as processes of narrative manipulation might lead to disinformation and propaganda, reconfiguring politics and international relations in a fundamental way. Targeting certain audiences, bringing in “othering processes” (“us” versus “them”) and gaining new forms of political legitimation or resistance and agency (**Rumelili**, 2011; 2015), narratives are a powerful media tool. The shift from Ukrainian friendly relations with Russia to a state of war since 2014 shows the reconfiguration of the identity narrative from “brotherhood” to “the other as enemy,” is illustrative, implying Ukraine's adaptation of its system of meaning socially and politically. Political resistance to Russia came to reinforce Ukraine's national narrative as independent and distinct from that of Russia (**Freire**, 2020).

In the intertwined process of policy building and narrative construction and dissemination, language is power, and the ways in which we communicate are a form of power projection. Therefore, technology becomes an enhancer or blocker of certain narratives and perceptions associated with these. This implies that social media, echo chambers, big data, and national and international politics interact and are co-constitutive in narrative-construction processes. These can lead to dynamics of reaffirmation as well as of contestation, which can be amplified or silenced, and conveyed to inform or manipulate opinion. Certainly, these intermediated narratives in social networks affect policy choices and their implications (**Kurban; Peña-López; Haberer**, 2017; **Edwards; Hecht**, 2010), having in mind technologies are not per se technopolitics, it is

“the practice of using them in political processes and/or toward political aims [that] constitutes technopolitics” (**Edwards; Hecht**, 2010, pp. 256-257).

Emotions need also to be brought into this picture as they are a fundamental part of international relations and foreign policy making (**Hutchison; Bleiker**, 2014). According to these authors, emotions are reflected in the way political issues are perceived, such as the emotional impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, regarding perceptions of national security, identity, and politics of legitimation. The role of “fear,” “hatred,” “humiliation,” “anger” is part of the construct. Other contexts provide for solidarity emotions, like “empathy,” “compassion,” “respect,” “dignity,” such as a natural catastrophe like the recent earthquake affecting wide areas in Syria and Turkey. Others still invoke nationalist narratives to emotionally appeal to political support, building on public discontent and rallying on beliefs, with the war in Ukraine constituting a good example. These emotional approaches to politics conveyed through the media gain significance, and a new dimensionality in the public space when disintermediated scenarios are used, with capacity to influence democratic processes, as in the case of electoral processes mentioned before, and to deepen polarization, as never before. Although not new, narratives loaded by emotions have been gaining increasing space in the construction of political identities and programmatic objectives within the communication paradigm shift.

“ The influence of media discourses in democracies, in political communication and in IR is decentralized, breaking the top-down informational model that occurred with mediatization ”

This articulation of social media, politics and emotions gives shape to social and political processes that might be reframed and reactivated through mechanisms of disinformation and propaganda, giving space and voice to certain actors and themes, and silencing others. In cases of violent conflict, **Reinke-de-Buitrago** (2022) argues

“Social media narratives are a powerful media tool to address the public and obtain new forms of political legitimization, resistance or intervention”

there is a tendency to exaggerate positive narratives about “us” while also exaggerating negative narratives about “the other,” implying an essentialization and emotionalization of othering in the dichotomy good and bad, as visible in the case of the war in Ukraine. The binary reality construction that results from representations like “right and wrong, truth and lies, information and propaganda” undermines the communication credibility of the “other” (**Simons**, 2018). Narrative manipulation in digital scenarios is, therefore, a central piece in this power game.

The role of disinformation and propaganda in international relations is, thus, widely acknowledged as bringing fundamental challenges to international politics and particularly democratic processes. The rise in authoritarianism, strong leaders, polarization and the declining trust in political institutions, are some of the issues highlighted, with Russia’s “anti-liberal wave” contributing to weaken western hegemony in the global sphere of information (**Gerrits**, 2018). Although not a new phenomenon, as argued, it has been amplified and it gained new dimensions in the media-politics interaction enhanced by technological evolution. Governments and international organizations have been taking measures to identify, control and resignify propagandistic and disinformation narratives, such as the case of the European Union’s establishment of the *East StratCom Task Force* in 2015 to counter Russia’s disinformation (*EEAS*, 2023).

In Russia, mirroring techniques and language appropriation in narratives (re)constructions are followed (**Baumann**, 2020). For example, the Doctrine on Information Security adopted in December 2016 underlines information manipulation as having clear impact on international security and stability, extending to Russia itself (**Gerrits**, 2018). The author further argues that the narrative of western pressure on Russian civilizational principles, traditional and moral values, is very much present in the doctrine, appealing to emotional attachment, and reflecting the understanding that information and communication are part of the toolkit in the Ukrainian warfare context (**Gerrits**, 2018). In this way, the war in Ukraine is representative of narrative-building, identity formulations and emotional appeals, coordinated with disinformation and propaganda, turning this complex conflicting and contestation scenario in an arena for information warfare. This entails technopolitics at the service of governments, intergovernmental organizations, private military groups, civil society organizations, with clear political goals, materializing propaganda “as a weapon of war, and disinformation as an instrument of foreign policy” (**Gerrits**, 2018). This is further analyzed in the next section.

5. Ukraine’s war case: disintermediation and technopolitics with Zelensky

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 fully escalated the ongoing war raging since 2014, a time when violence broke out in the Donbass and Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation. The shifting narratives seeking to gain legitimacy for political decisions and moves, have been marked by competing dynamics in fake news, disinformation and propagandistic narratives between Russia and the west, here the focus of analysis. In line with **Welch-Larson** and **Shevchenko** (2014, p. 277), the

“risk that continued Russian bitterness over its loss of great power status”

after the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union, could

“lead to a return of geopolitical competition”

was confirmed, and perceived humiliation and status dissonance clearly underpin twists and turns in Russia’s relations with the west than more conventional power or interest-based explanations (**Welch-Larson**; **Shevchenko**, 2014). This confirms the importance of material and non-material readings of foreign policy and the role of media amplification of these.

The “reintegration” of Crimea in 2014, as claimed by the Russians, who understand this was the correction of an “outrageous historical injustice,” through “powerful emotive words” (*BBC*, 2014) frames this very moment in historical and identity terms and brings emotions to densify the political narrative’s appeal. This interpretation was opposed by western understandings that this was an act of annexation, illegal in light of international law. This same line of disagreement marks narrative exchange throughout this war. Dueling arguments put forward distinct visions of the war and the international order, with Russia claiming US hegemonic status undermines multipolarity and imposes a liberal-rules-based order, the Atlantic Alliance is a direct threat to Russia’s security, the post-Soviet space is an integral part of Russia and of its collective identity imaginary, and status-seeking envisages the recognition of Russia as a great power. For the west, Russia’s revisionist and militarized course seeking to overthrow the international order needs to be contained, Russia became the most important threat to European security, western institutions reinforcement and the legitimacy of the rules-based order need to be assu-

“Emotionality in politics transmitted through the media takes on a new dimensionality in disintermediated scenarios with the capacity to influence democratic processes”

red. The clashing narratives become evident: they refer to the recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty, but also its denial; the "brotherhood" that unites the two nations, but also the "violence" that separates them translated in the "threat to compatriots" narrative (Strycharz, 2022); and that it is not the objective of the special military operation to occupy Ukrainian territory, however the referendums in Donetsk and Lugansk, and in the regions of Zaporizhia and Kherson led to the annexation of these territories by the Russian Federation.

“ Social media information is clearly disruptive, affecting perceptions and reinforcing contradictions, because of the speed, the wide reach and the difficulty of sorting out information from disinformation ”

The media coverage of the war ingrains generally these distinct and conflicting narratives that have taken on a global dimension for a conflict transmitted through *TikTok* (Chayka, 2022). Western and Russian media immediately assumed opposite positions and activated collective imaginaries through propaganda and disinformation. The mirroring image is reflected on how for Russia disinformation aimed at undermining public opinion support for Ukraine, whereas in the west the opposite applied. Also, political elites in Russia are the main drivers of disinformation campaigns, as keeping a hold on information contributes to better control domestic audiences (Oates, 2016). According to Pierri *et al.* (2023, p. 65) Russian propaganda became

“less prevalent after the invasion, following platforms' intervention, European sanctions on state outlets and Russian ban on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, but it did not disappear completely.”

Low-credibility content showed a stable trend in the number of reshares and retweets, and a certain group of influential and verified *Facebook* pages and *Twitter* users shows that a handful of them accounts for 60-80% of all the reshares and retweets of problematic content (Pierri *et al.*, 2023, p. 65).

Interestingly also, the “propaganda fights and disinformation campaigns” cross-cut western and Russian discourse on the war in Ukraine, with the “othering” narrative fueling conflicting visions, as analyzed. Nevertheless, these conflicting representations from both Russia and the west used the liberal language as a reference point (Baumann, 2020), which allowed for successive dynamics of confirmation and denial in the interaction between these two conflicting parties. Moreover, Gerrits (2018) underlines that these disinformation campaigns did not really create divisions, they explored them to each own's advantage. And this process was reinforced by tweets, retweets, posts, likes, and shares, which amplify the message according to the audience it is targeting, following on the assumption that social media give space to many different voices from very different societal sectors. This means these processes are clearly disruptive, affect perceptions and reinforce contradictions, by the speed, wide reach, and difficulty in separating information from disinformation, facts-checking from propagandistic contents, but do not necessarily change “the international power balance,” in the sense the power projection Russia aspires to has not been clearly realized.

The shift in the communicative paradigm flagged in the networks, with previous events such as the Arab Spring or the 15M in Spain, has been once again evidenced in the Ukraine's war by “redirecting political and military tactics” (Morejón-Llomas; Martín-Ramallal; Micalletto-Belda, 2022, p. 4). However, the development of the narratives surrounding this conflict includes specific issues that have marked significant differences from other conflicts that have strengthened the effect of disintermediation and technopolitics: President Zelenski's digital political communication strategy. The Ukrainian president has managed to move the war into social networks, generating

“millions of interactions and content on the main platforms, where messages of support and calls for Ukraine's resistance multiply” (Olivares-García; Román-San-Miguel; Méndez-Majuelos, 2022, p. 2).

For the first time ever, he has led what has been called the first war on *TikTok* (Chayka, 2022), although the President has inundated all social networks with content (*Instagram*, *Telegram*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *TikTok*).

It seems demonstrated, that the change in the format, the speed and ways of communicating through new media, has a clear impact in international relations, and particularly in foreign policy, in a double sense: on the one hand, with novelty and emerging digital narratives construction in the field of digital communication; and on the other hand, with disinformation and propagandistic campaigns directly consumed by the general public, allowing constant interaction and mimicking of voiced opinions and views, many times uncritically. In this way, the role of digital literacy has been gaining more space in the agendas.

6. Digital literacy and politics: a necessary binomial for a disintermediated scenario

The communicative paradigm shift described above, in which the citizen is a direct interlocutor of politicians and institutions in the network scenario, relevantly affects the political context and international relations, as has been analyzed in previous epigraphs. Disinformation and the affective polarization fostered in this network context become a phenomenon “we must learn to live with” (Gerrits, 2018, p. 13) either as an unavoidable burden of our technified and networked societies, which have amplified the propagandistic and manipulative phenomenon, or as a challenge in the face of an unstoppable transformation of paradigms with interesting possibilities for the political and communicative sphere (Tea-Charis *et al.*, 2023), as reflected in the Ukraine's war.

Regardless of the perspective adopted, many authors increasingly advocate the presence of media and/or digital literacy as a non-offensive but effective response to counter disinformation and polarization in the realm of politics (**Ashley; Maks; Craft**, 2017; **Mason; Krutka; Stoddard**, 2018; **Guess; Munger**, 2022; **Polizzi**, 2019; **McDugall**, 2019; **Sun; Kai**, 2020) and what it entails:

“Education is the least offensive response, perhaps also the most effective, but, unfortunately, it is also the most difficult and time-consuming to respond to misinformation” (**Gerrits**, 2018, p. 14).

While earlier works put the focus on media literacy for civic and political participation (**Kahne; Lee; Timpany-Fezell**, 2012; **Ashley; Maks; Craft**, 2017; **Kahne; Bowyer**, 2019), later works have already put the emphasis on how digital literacy is fundamental to democracy (**Polizzi**, 2019; **Salma**, 2019), including how it can be a decisive factor in international relations (**Gerrits**, 2018) that have also shifted their conversational arena to networks (**Barnett et al.**, 2017).

The relationship between digital literacy and political commitment has been highlighted by authors such as **Ashley, Maks** and **Craft** (2017), or **Kahne** and **Bowyer** (2019). The concept itself evolved trying to embrace the impact of digital transformations that are consolidated around communication and politics. In this respect it is worth mentioning the critical digital literacy from **Polizzi** (2017), or what **Salma** (2019) points out, the need to integrate within the concept training about the current social and political structures, including technopolitics as an essential area, as a safeguard of democratic processes and in the fight against disinformation. More recent works such as those by **Olivares-García, Román-San-Miguel** and **Méndez-Majuelos** (2022, p. 4) propose content curation and fact checking

“to overcome misinformation, contextualise facts and provide resources for media literacy.”

Despite being one of the most frequently invoked concepts, finding an agreed definition of digital literacy is certainly complicated because it is a porous concept that often overlaps with others such as digital skills, media literacy or information literacy. In this case, we take as a reference the conceptualization proposed by **Guess** and **Munger** (2022) who related online political behavior to digital literacy in their study, taking the latter as

“a crucial factor in online political behaviour whose role has been obscured to date by disciplinary practices designed for an earlier media-technological environment” (**Guess; Munger**, 2022, p. 114).

The authors take a dual conceptualization of the term: on the one hand, as the ability to discern information found on the web, and, on the other hand, combined with the basic digital skills needed to achieve it. While digital literacy is associated with the digitalization of information (**Glistner**, 1997), media literacy is associated with media education, and both are currently combined in an attempt to respond to problems arising from the shift in the communication paradigm and media convergence, as described above. This is evidenced by authors such as **Kahne, Lee** and **Timpany-Fezell** (2012) when they speak of “digital media literacy” or **Polizzi** (2017) and **Santisteban, Díez-Bedmar** and **Castellví** (2020) when they propose a critical digital literacy.

Outside the academic sphere, supranational organizations are also increasingly committed to the combination of digital literacy and politics. *Unesco* (2022), the *OECD* (2021) or the *European Commission*, which in the 2018 report by the *High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation* proposed, as one of the main recommendations, to promote media and digital literacy among citizens. Also, the *European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)*, created in 2020, proposed to motivate media literacy as a key element to counteract disinformation among its main actions.

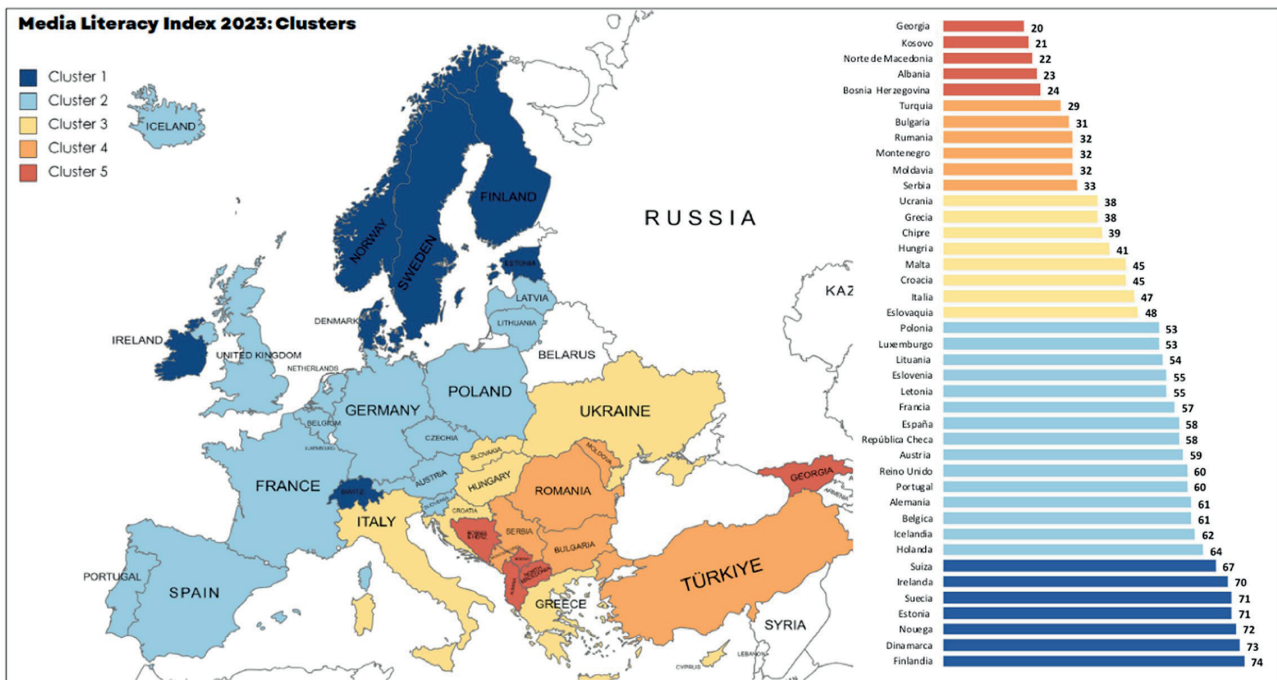
In the political arena, different governments around the world have understood the importance of proper digital literacy as a guarantee of a citizenry that can properly exercise its freedoms, and whose lack does not endanger the democratic guarantees of an informed and critical public debate, which knows how to protect itself against disinformation and emotional polarization by being trained in the use of the digital context and its tools.

Examples illustrating these concerns can be found in the French government that expanded funding for online courses about the drawbacks of the Internet in 2015, providing 30,000 teachers and other educational workers with yearly training in the field of digital literacy (**Satariano; Peltier**, 2018). Additionally, the Italian government has strongly trained a new generation of students in safe Internet use as well as identifying fake news and conspiracy theories through class projects created by reporters in partnership with *Facebook*. Students in high school receive instruction on the political economy aspects of social media businesses, including information on how *Facebook* “likes” are politicized and monetized (**Horowitz**, 2017).

Despite a clear interest in the training of the youngest, there are countries with an extra concern in citizens’ protection regarding international disinformation as an issue affecting internal politics. This is Finland’s case, whose borders with Russia from 2014, when Moscow annexed Crimea and supported rebels in the East of Ukraine, made them understand that the war of disinformation was being moved to the Internet (**Mackintosh**, 2019).

“Digital literacy is increasingly present as a non-offensive but effective response to counter disinformation and polarization in politics”

“Digital literacy is fundamental to democracy and even a decisive factor in IR, which has also shifted its arena of conversation to networks”



Graphic 1. *Media Literacy Index* in Europe. Elaborated from *Media Literacy Index 2023*

International concern in this regard is reflected in the annual –since 2017– *Media Literacy Index* report produced by the Bulgarian non-governmental organization *Open Society Institute-Sofia*. The report seeks to promote education according to legislation and measures not the digital literacy of each country but the predictors of media literacy, with the aim of ranking societies according to their potential for resilience in the face of post-truth, disinformation and misinformation. Its measurement methodology uses four types of indicators: media freedom, education, trust and new forms of participation (e-participation). Of all the countries (a total of 47) participating in the index, 41 countries are European (Figure 1) and 6 countries outside Europe: Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, South Korea and the USA.

7. Final remarks

Political polarization and disinformation erode the ability of citizens to censor anti-democratic behavior (Guess; Munger, 2022) as demonstrated by academic works, the international context and the countries themselves with specific actions that relate both fields: digital literacy and politics. In this sense, digital literacy may act as a catalyst in the processes of polarization and disinformation that constantly take place in social networks, spaces from which the population is regularly informed, especially the youngest (Pérez-Escoda; Pedrero-Esteban, 2021).

It appears logical to assume that, if the scenarios of politics have also changed or amplified, as have other scenarios –educational, social, business, etc.– in which digital literacy is considered a fundamental tool for being efficient and effective citizens, it should also be considered in the field of politics, technopolitics and digital political communication in the same way. As this article has analyzed, narrative building is key to understand dynamics of legitimation, based on identity, status-seeking, and emotions, very much present in the case of the war in Ukraine. Technopolitics is the enactment of politics and technology with clearly defined political aims, where emotions constitute a catalyst to appeal to the audiences, and where disinformation might play a central role, as argued. Such narratives foster polarization and disinformation, and contribute to exacerbating understandings, mobilizing audiences and directly influencing willingness, foreign policy and international relations. This interconnection goes further in this analysis by looking at digital literacy as fundamental to address the challenges associated to these processes and how we can reply to those.

Therefore, the emerging connection between digital literacy and technopolitics finds, today more than ever, a profound sense in safeguarding democracies and guarantees for a trained population (Tytova; Mereniuk, 2022) that together with appropriate actions and policies in the field of critical digital literacy (Polizzi, 2019) ensures an informed population, permeable to the unstoppable changes that the use of technology imposes, regardless of the fact that the current information context is disintermediated.

“ Digital literacy is a key tool for efficient and effective citizenship, also in the field of politics, technopolitics and digital political communication ”

8. References

- Ashley, Seth; Maksl, Adam; Craft, Stephanie** (2017). "News media literacy and political engagement: What's the connection?". *Journal of media literacy education*, v. 9, n. 1, pp. 79-98.
<https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2017-9-1-6>
- Barnett, George A.; Xu, Wayne W.; Chu, Jianxum; Jiang, Ke; Huh, Catherine; Park, Ji Y.; Park, Han W.** (2017). "Measuring international relations in social media conversations". *Government information quarterly*, v. 34, n. 1, pp. 37-44.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.12.004>
- Baumann, Mario** (2020). "'Propaganda fights' and 'disinformation campaigns': The discourse on information warfare in Russia-West Relations". *Contemporary politics*, v. 26, n. 3, pp. 288-307.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1728612>
- BBC** (2014). "Crimea crisis: Russian President Putin's speech annotated", 19 March.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26652058>
- Bonansinga, Donatella** (2022). "'A threat to us': The interplay of insecurity and enmity narratives in left-wing populism". *The British journal of politics and international relations*, v. 4, n. 3.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221078187>
- Borge, Rosa; Brugué, Joaquim; Duenas-Cid, David** (2022). "Technology and democracy: the who and how in decision-making. The cases of Estonia and Catalonia". *Profesional de la información*, v. 31, n. 3, e310311.
<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.may.11>
- Carpenter, Cheris A.** (2010). "The Obamachine: Technopolitics 2.0". *Journal of information technology & politics*, v. 7, n. 2-3, pp. 216-225.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681003765887>
- Casero-Ripollés, Andreu** (2008). "Modelos de relación entre periodistas y políticos: La perspectiva de la negociación constante". *Estudios del mensaje periodístico*, v. 14, pp. 111-128.
<https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/ESMP/article/view/ESMP0808110111A/11830>
- Casero-Ripollés, Andreu** (2022). "The great change: Impact of social media on the relationship between journalism and politics. Introduction to the special issue". *Social sciences*, v. 11, n. 40.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11020040>
- Castells, Manuel** (2001). *La galaxia Internet. Reflexiones sobre Internet, empresa y sociedad*. Plaza & Janés Editores. ISBN: 8401341574
- Chadwick, Andrew** (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978 0 190696733
- Chayka, Kyle** (2022). "Watching the world's 'First TikTok war'". *The New Yorker*.
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/infinite-scroll/watching-the-worlds-first-tiktok-war>
- Couldry, Nick; Livingstone, Sonia; Markham, Tim** (2007). *Media consumption and public engagement*. Palgrave MacMillan. ISBN: 978 0 02324738 3
- Ebersbach, Anja; Glaser, Markus; Heigl, Richard** (2008). *Social web*. Konstanz: UVK. ISBN: 978 3 825230654
- Edwards, Paul N.; Hecht, Gabrielle** (2010). "History and the technopolitics of identity: The case of Apartheid South Africa". *Journal of Southern African studies*, v. 36, n. 3, pp. 619-639.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2010.507568>
- EEAS** (2023). *Counterig disinformation*. European External Action Service, Brussels.
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/questions-and-answers-about-east-stratcom-task-force_en#11232
- Freire, Maria-Raquel** (2019). "The quest for status: how the interplay of power, ideas, and regime security shapes Russia's policy in the post-Soviet space". *International politics*, v. 56, pp. 795-809.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0164-y>
- Freire, Maria-Raquel** (2020). "EU and Russia competing projects in the neighbourhood: an ontological security approach". *Revista brasileira de política internacional*, v. 63, n. 1.
<https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329202000113>
- Gerrits, André W. M.** (2018). "Disinformation in international relations: How important is it?". *Security and human rights*, v. 29, n.1-4, pp. 3-23.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02901007>
- Glister, Paul** (1997). *Digital literacy*. Wiley Computer Pub. ISBN: 978 0 471249528

- Guess, Andrew M.; Munger, Kevin** (2022). "Digital literacy and online political behavior". *Political science research and methods*, v. 11, n. 1.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2022.17>
- Horowitz, Jason** (2017). "In Italian schools, reading, writing and recognizing fake news". *The New York Times*, October 18.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/world/europe/italy-fake-news.html>
- Hutchison, Emma; Bleiker, Roland** (2014). "Theorizing emotions in world politics". *International theory*, v. 6, n. 3, pp. 491-514.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000232>
- Jenkins, Henry** (2006). *Convergence culture. La cultura de la convergencia de los medios de comunicación*. Barcelona: Paidós. ISBN: 978 84 493 2153 5
- Jepperson, Ronald; Wendt, Alexander; Katzenstein, Peter J.** (1996). "Norms, identity, and culture in national security". In: Katzenstein, Peter (ed.). *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 33-65. ISBN: 978 0 231104692
- Jungherr, Andreas; Rivero, Gonzalo; Gayo-Avello, Daniel** (2020). *Retooling politics: How digital media are shaping democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978 1 108297820
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108297820>
- Kahne, Joseph; Bowyer, Benjamin** (2019). "Can media literacy education increase digital engagement in politics?". *Learning, media and technology*, v. 44, n. 2, pp. 211-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2019.1601108>
- Kahne, Joseph; Lee, Nam-Jin; Timpany-Feezell, Jessica** (2012). "Digital media literacy education and online civic and political participation". *International journal of communication*, v. 6.
<https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/999/675>
- Katz, Elihu** (1988). "Disintermediation: Cutting out the middle man". *Intermedia*, v. 16, n. 2, pp. 30-31.
https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/162
- Kurban, Can; Peña-López, Ismael; Haberer, Maria** (2017). "What is technopolitics? A conceptual schema for understanding politics in the digital age". *IDP. Revista de internet, derecho y política*, n. 24, pp. 3-20.
<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/788/78850913002.pdf>
- Lasswell, Harold** (1927). "The theory of political propaganda". *American political science review*, v. 2, n. 3, pp. 627-631.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1945515>
- Lévy, Pierre** (2004). *Inteligencia colectiva. Por una antropología del ciberespacio*. Editorial OPS. ISBN: 2707126934
- López-Jiménez, Gloria** (2014). "El proceso de desintermediación comunicativa". *Revista internacional del mundo económico y del derecho*, v. 7, pp. 69-91.
<https://bit.ly/3PJ3QhJ>
- Mackintosh, Eliza** (2019). *Special report: Finland is winning the war on fake news. What it's learned may be crucial to Western democracy*. CNN.
<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/05/europe/finland-fake-news-intl>
- Mason, Lance; Krutka, Dan; Stoddard, Jeremy** (2018). "Media literacy, democracy, and the challenge of fake news". *Journal of media literacy education*, v. 10, n. 2.
<https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2018-10-2-1>
- Mcchesney, Robert** (2013). "Aquello es ahora, y esto fue entonces: Walter Lippmann y la crisis del periodismo". *CIC. Cuadernos de información y comunicación*, v. 18, pp. 39-49.
<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=93528051004>
- McCombs, Maxwell** (1992). "Explorers and surveyors: Expanding strategies for agenda-setting research". *Journalism quarterly*, v. 69, n. 4, pp. 813-824.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909206900402>
- McDougall, Julian** (2019). "Media literacy versus fake news: critical thinking, resilience and civic engagement". *Media studies*, v. 10, n. 19, pp. 29-45.
<https://doi.org/10.20901/ms.10.19.2>
- Miskimmon, Alister; O'Loughlin, Ben; Roselle, Laura** (2014). *Strategic narratives. Communication power and the New World Order*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978 0 415717601

- Morejón-Llamas, Noemí; Martín-Ramallal, Pablo; Micaletto-Belda, Juan-Pablo** (2022). "Twitter content curation as an antidote to hybrid warfare during Russia's invasion of Ukraine". *Profesional de la información*, v. 31, n. 3, e310308. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.may.08>
- Munger, Kevin** (2020). "All the news that's fit to click: The economics of clickbait media". *Political communication*, v. 37, n. 3, pp. 376-397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1687626>
- Oates, Sarah** (2016). "Russian media in the digital age: Propaganda rewired". *Russian politics*, v. 1, n. 4, pp. 398-417. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-8921-00104004>
- OECD (2021). *Are 15-years-olds prepared to deal with fake news and misinformation? PISA in Focus*. OECD, 2012. <https://read.oecd.org/10.1787/6ad5395e-en?format=pdf>
- Olivares-García, Francisco; Román-San-Miguel, Aranzazu; Méndez-Majuelos, Inés** (2022). "Social networks as a journalistic communication tool: Volodimir Zelenski's digital communication strategy during the Ukraine war". *Visual review. International visual culture review / Revista internacional de cultura visual*, v. 11, n. 2. <https://doi.org/10.37467/revvisual.v9.3660>
- O'Reilly, Tim** (2009). *What is web 2.0?* O'Reilly Radar. ISBN: 978 1 449391072
- Parisi, Lorenza; Rega, Rosella** (2011). "Disintermediation in political communication: chance or missed opportunity?". *Leadership and new trends in political communication*, 123. https://www.academia.edu/download/33769935/Disintermediation_in_Political_Communication.pdf
- Pérez-Escoda, Ana; Pedrero-Esteban, Luis-Miguel** (2021) "Challenges for journalism facing social networks, fake news, and the distrust of Generation Z". *Revista latina de comunicación social*, v. 79, pp. 67-85. <https://www.doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2021-1519>
- Pérez-Escoda, Ana; Rubio-Romero, Juana** (2021). *Redes sociales, ¿el quinto poder? Una aproximación por ámbitos al fenómeno que ha transformado la comunicación pública y privada*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch. ISBN: 978 84 18802898
- Pierri, Francesco; Luceri, Luca; Jindal, Nikhil; Ferrara, Emilio** (2023). "Propaganda and misinformation on Facebook and Twitter during the Russian invasion of Ukraine". *15th ACM Web science conference 2023*. New York: ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3578503.3583597>
- Polizzi, Gianfranco** (2019). "Information literacy in the digital age: Why critical digital literacy matters for democracy". In: S. Goldstein (ed.). *Informed societies: Why information literacy matters for citizenship, participation, and democracy*. Facet. <https://doi.org/10.29085/9781783303922.003>
- Reinke-de-Buitrago, Sybille** (2022). "Visual framings of the war in Ukraine: Evoking emotions and mobilization". *DiscourseNet collaborative working paper series*, n. 8/5. <https://discourseanalysis.net/dncwps>
https://discourseanalysis.net/sites/default/files/2022-11/Reinke-de-Buitrago_2022_DNCWPS_8-5.pdf
- Ritzer, George; Dean, Paul; Jurgenson, Nathan** (2012). "The coming of age of the prosumer". *American behavioral scientist*, v. 56, n. 4, pp. 379-398. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211429368>
- Rumelili, Bahar** (2011). "Turkey: identity, foreign policy, and socialization in a post enlargement Europe". *Journal of European integration*, v. 33, n. 2, pp. 235-249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2011.543528>
- Rumelili, Bahar** (ed.). (2015). *Conflict resolution and ontological security: Peace anxieties*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978 1 138205741
- Salma, Aqida-Nuril** (2019). "Defining digital literacy in the age of computational propaganda and hate spin politics". *KnE social sciences*, v. 3, n. 20, pp. 323-338. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i20.4945>
- Sampedro, Víctor** (2021). *Comunicación política digital en España*. Editorial UOC. ISBN: 978 84 91807681
- Santisteban, Antoni; Díez-Bedmar, María-Consuelo; Castellví, Jordi** (2020). "Critical digital literacy of future teachers in the Twitter age". *Culture and education*, v. 32, n. 2, pp. 185-212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2020.1741875>
- Satariano, Adam; Peltier, Elian** (2018). "In France, school lessons ask: Which Twitter post should you trust?". *The New York Times*, December 13. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/13/technology/france-internet-literacy-school.html>

- Schütz, Winfried** (2004). "Reconstructing mediatization as an analytical concept". *European journal of communication*, v. 19, n.1, pp. 87-101.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040696>
- Scolari, Carlos A.** (2015). *Ecología de los medios. Entornos, evoluciones e interpretaciones*. Barcelona: Gedisa. ISBN: 978 84 97848268
- Simons, Greg** (2018). "Media and public diplomacy". In: Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Routledge handbook of Russian foreign policy*. London: Routledge, pp. 109-216. ISBN: 978 1 138690448
- Strycharz, Damian** (2022). "Dominant narratives, external shocks, and the Russian annexation of Crimea". *Problems of post-Communism*, v. 69, n. 2, pp. 133-144.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1813594>
- Sun, Lim; Kai, Tan** (2020). "Front liners fighting fake news: global perspectives on mobilising young people as media literacy advocates". *Journal of children and media*, v. 14, n. 4, pp. 529-535.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2020.1827817>
- Theocharis, Yannis; Boulianne, Shelley; Koc-Michalska, Karolina; Bimber, Bruce** (2022) "Platform affordances and political participation: how social media reshape political engagement". *West European politics*, v. 46, n. 4, pp. 788-811.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2087410>
- Unesco (2022). *Navegando en la infodemia con AMI*. Unesco / Defensoría del Público de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual de Argentina. ISBN: 978 92 3 300182 4
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381840>
- Vaccari, Cristian; Valeriani, Augusto** (2021). *Outside the bubble: Social media and political participation in Western democracies get access arrow*. Oxford: University Press. ISBN: 978 0 190858476
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190858476.001.0001>
- Welch-Larson, Deborah; Shevchenko, Alexei** (2014). "Russia says no: Power, status, and emotions in foreign policy". *Communist and post-Communist studies*, v. 47, n. 3-4, pp. 269-279.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.003>
- Wendt, Alexander** (1992). "Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics". *International organization*, v. 46, n. 2, pp. 391-425.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>

Dialnet | métricas
 Nueva edición 2020

Fundación Dialnet

dialnet.unirioja.es/metricas